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THE BEGINNING AND END OF YOUTH IN ROMAN ANTIQUITY¹

EMIEL EYBEN, Leuven

Scholars like J.H. Van den Berg and P. Ariès² — not professional historians by origin — introduced a dramatic innovation in historical approaches. Influenced by their pioneering research on children in the past, many modern psychologists, sociologists or historians don't consider childhood (or youth, old age, maternal love...) as a natural, universal, ageless and self-evident "phenomenon" anymore. For F. Musgrove, for example, the concept of youth as a separate age of man is fairly recent. This sociologist expresses his opinion in a radical way: "The adolescent as a distinct species is the creation of modern social attitudes and institutions. A creature neither child nor adult, he is a comparatively recent socio-psychological invention, scarcely two centuries old. [...] The adolescent was invented at the same time as the steam engine. The principal architect of the latter was Watt in 1765, of the former Rousseau in 1762".³

Such statements are a simplification of historical reality. The view of A. Kriekemans is more balanced: depending on the cultural

¹ This paper is based on the first chapter of my book *De jonge Romein volgens de literaire bronnen der periode ca. 200 v. Chr. tot ca. 500 n. Chr.* (Brussel, 1977) (mentioned in the notes as JR). An abridged and revised edition of this book came out as *De onstuimigen. Jeugd en (on)deugd in het Oude Rome* (Kapellen, 1987). An English version — *Restless Youth in Roman Antiquity* — will be published shortly by Routledge (London). The translations from most ancient sources are borrowed from the *Loeb Classical Library*. For the translation from Dutch I am indebted to my Irish friend Patrick Daly.

² J.H. Van den Berg, *Metabletica of leer der veranderingen* (Nijkerk, 1956); P. Ariès, *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'ancien régime* (Paris, 1960).

³ F. Musgrove, *Youth and the Social Order* (London, 1968²) 13 ff. ("Making adolescents") and 33 ff. ("The invention of the adolescent").

environment, the term "youth" may cover a different period of life and may be more or less complicated, involving varying levels of conflict, having its own identity, its own way of living, its own status, and its own expectations.⁴ Let us apply these words to Roman antiquity and examine the place of youth in the human life span as well as the circumstances which made possible its existence as a separate entity. Before starting the exposition itself, it should be noted that we are dealing with upper-class youth (we know almost nothing about youth in the lower classes) and with the young man (girls mostly married between the ages of 12 and 15 and there was no real interval between childhood and adulthood).

A. A SOCIETY THAT GAVE ITS YOUTH ITS HEAD⁵

The Romans divided the human life span into several phases. The categories advanced by Varro (117-27 B.C.) are best known. This scholar distinguished five fifteen-year periods in human life. For him *adulescentia* fell between *pueritia* (from birth until the age of fifteen) and *iuventus* (from thirty to forty-five).⁶

Adulthood is termed *iuventus* in Varro's classification; this refers to the famous reform of the army by Servius Tullius in which citizens were divided into three age groups. Men were considered *pueri* up to the age of seventeen, *iuniores* up to the age of forty-six, and anyone older belonged to the *seniores*. *Iuventus*, youth, or more accurately (young) adulthood, lasted from seventeen to forty-six in these early times, and the males falling within this age group had as their task the defence of the fatherland. In a later period, too, *iuventus* could have a wide application, yet, unlike in the scheme proposed by Varro, it was not normally considered the age which followed *adulescentia*. A young man between the ages of fifteen and thirty could be termed *adulescens* as well as *iuvenis*.⁷

The distinction drawn by Varro between *iuventus* and *adulescentia* was quite artificial. On the other hand his categorization reflected social realities. Youth started when the boy assumed the

⁴ A. Kriekemans, *Geschiedenis van de jeugdpsychologie* (Tielt-Den Haag, 1967) p. 298.

⁵ Cf. *JR* p. 65 ff.

⁶ Varro, in: Censorinus, *De die natali*, 14,2.

⁷ Cf. B. Axelson, "Die Synonyme 'adulescens' und 'iuvenis'", in: *Mélanges J. Marouzeau* (Paris, 1948) pp. 7-17.

adult toga (*toga virilis*), it ended with the beginning of a political career, the *cursus honorum*.

The acceptance of the adult toga⁸ — a "rite of passage" which marked the transition from childhood to manhood — was a big event in a young man's life. He cast off certain attributes of childhood (the *insignia pueritiae*) such as the *bullā* (a locket which contained a charm against the evil eye) and the *toga praetexta* (a toga with a purple border which was worn by children and some high magistrates and priests), and put on the *toga virilis*, a snow-white garment which was also called *toga pura* and *toga libera*, terms which owed their origin not so much to the fact that this ceremony marked the inauguration of freedom — which was in fact the case — but to the fact that initiation into adulthood usually — but by no means always — took place on March 17, the day on which the Italian god of fertility Liber was traditionally celebrated.

The age at which the adult toga was assumed was not always the same. It was parents who decided whether their son had the necessary physical and mental maturity. In an earlier period the formal change of dress generally took place at seventeen, an age at which physical puberty had been attained for some time and at which military service began. In a fairly primitive society such a person was deemed sufficiently "matured" to function as a fully-fledged member of society. The more complex the social structures became, the less this was the case. The social importance of the acceptance of the adult toga gradually decreased and, hand in hand with this development, the ceremony took place at an earlier age. During the late Republic and early Empire the age ranged from fourteen to sixteen, fourteen being the legal minimum age of puberty. In Varro's classification youth began at fifteen and this was the age at which the toga was usually adopted in his day.

The *iuventus*, comprising young men between seventeen and forty-six, was not originally subdivided. A change occurred after ca. 200 B.C. Rome was able to breathe again after the shock of the second Punic War (218-201 B.C.). It had become the undisputed world power and was flooded with various influences from the Greek world, with luxury and wealth. Rome owed its survival to a large extent to the *iuventus*, yet once the war was over the elders, in a world which had now become so much more complex, felt that the

⁸ Cf. E. Eyben, "Geschlechtsreife und Ehe im griechisch-römischen Altertum und im frühen Christentum", in: E.W. Müller (Ed.), *Geschlechtsreife und Legitimation zur Zeugung* (Freiburg-München, 1985) pp. 412 ff.; T.E.J. Wiedemann, *Romans and Children in the Roman Empire* (London, 1989) pp. 114-117.

younger generation presented a threat and that seventeen was much too young an age to let someone bear "adult responsibility". The *Lex Villia annalis* (180 B.C.) and the *Lex [P]laetoria* (ca. 200 B.C.) were largely responsible for the creation of a new subcategory or age group, the "real" youth.

At a fairly early stage Romans came to believe that the average young man, given his "rashness", "inexperience", "frivolity"... (terms we regularly come across in later legal texts too), was not fit to take the legal consequences of his acts and needed special legal protection in private law. In about 200 B.C. the *Lex [P]laetoria*⁹ was enacted: it was a measure which offered persons under the age of twenty-five (*minores XXV annis*) protection against exploitation (*circumscriptio*). Initially the *minor* could only claim protection if he had been deceived intentionally, but later on he was allowed to cancel each transaction, even in the absence of evil intentions. In theory a minor's full legal capacity was not restricted, but in practice a young man quite understandably had difficulty in finding someone who was willing to do business with him; this emerges from Plautus where a desperate young man cries out: "But, oh dear me, I'm done for by that law regarding minors. Everyone's afraid of giving credit!".¹⁰

Throughout antiquity the capacity to act, which in theory a young man possessed from the moment he put on the *toga virilis*, in practice had more and more strings attached to it. Alongside the guardianship of children (*tutela impuberum*) there grew up a *cura minorum*, which gnawed at the de facto capacities of a youth under twenty-five more and more and towards the end of antiquity was extended so far that the limits between *cura* and *tutela* became largely blurred and in practice distinction was hardly made any longer between *impuberes* and *minores*.

Minority lasted until the age of twenty-five. In later antiquity, however, the emperor could provide young people with the benefit of legal age (the *venia aetatis*), young men at the age of twenty, girls at the age of eighteen, but this was not at all a general measure and asked a thorough investigation about their moral conduct, their intelligence of mind and the integrity of their character. "On the aforesaid age", the Theodosian Code continues, "since it is midway between fully completed youth and most robust young manhood

⁹ On the *Lex [P]laetoria* and the *minor aetas*, cf. E. Eyben, "Was the Roman 'Youth' an 'Adult' Socially?", *L'antiquité classique*, 50 (1981) pp. 329-331 (with further references).

¹⁰ Plautus, *Pseudolus*, 303-304 (trans. P. Nixon).

(*inter plenam perfectamque adulescentiam et robustissimam iuventutem media*), we impose the designation of the age of stability (*firmata aetas*). Therefore the first age is childhood, the following, youth, this age of stability is the third, the fourth is legal age, and the fifth, old age (*ut prima aetas pueritiae sit, sequens adulescentiae, firmata haec tertia, quarta legitima, quinta senectus habeatur*).¹¹

In private law the older generation sought to protect the young man against himself; in the political arena the elders tried to protect themselves against the bumptiousness of the younger generation. The earliest step in this direction was the *Lex Villia annalis*¹², which established (directly or indirectly) a minimum age — probably twenty-seven, in any case between twenty-five and thirty — for public office. Under Sulla, the minimum age for the quaestorship was thirty, the age at which, according to his contemporary Varro, *adulescentia* came to an end. Augustus reduced the age to twenty-five so that majority in private law and in politics should coincide. A lower minimum age was unthinkable for, as Maecenas stated in Dio Cassius' "Roman History", "is it not disgraceful, and indeed hazardous (*αἰσχρὸν καὶ σφαλερὸν*), to entrust the public business to men younger than this, when we never commit our private affairs to any one before he has reached this age?"¹³

Originally a young man was in full possession of all his rights at the age of seventeen, yet from ca. 200 B.C. onwards he had "to wait" until he was twenty-five/thirty before he was considered a real adult. If one also takes into account the fact that a young man generally married late and that studies — certainly under the Empire — could take a long time, then it is clear that there was a rather long period during which young people could really be considered young. The Elder Seneca describes this phenomenon well when he puts the following words in a youth's mouth: "I'm having the fun allowable at my age (*concessis aetati iocis utor*); I am taking advantage of the law for young men (*iuvenalis lex*). [...] As soon as I have got through this normal and indeed almost obligatory apprenticeship (*hoc tirocinium adulescentiae quasi debitum ac sollemne*), I shall return to good ways".¹⁴ Modern scholarship speaks of "Jugendraum" (E. Spranger) or "psycho-social moratory" (E. Erikson), the Romans called it *tirocinium adulescentiae*.

¹¹ *Theodosian Code*, 2,17 (trans. C. Pharr).

¹² Eyben, "Was the Roman 'Youth' an 'Adult' Socially?", pp. 331-332, with bibliography.

¹³ Dio, *Historia romana*, 52,20,1 (trans. E. Cary).

¹⁴ Seneca the Elder, *Controversiae*, 2,6,11 (trans. M. Winterbottom).

B. EVERY AGE OF MAN HAS ITS UNIQUE CHARACTER¹⁵

For Romans like Seneca, each age was endowed with its own, specific constitution (*constitutio*), "different in the case of the child, the youth, [the man] and the old man".¹⁶ Every age has its own physiology, its typical inclinations, entails new possibilities and takes away others. The specific characteristics of the different ages are emphasized by Cicero in the following passage in which each age is ascribed one specific and fundamental hall-mark: "Life's race-course is fixed: Nature has only a single path and that path is run but once, and to each stage of existence has been allotted its own appropriate quality (*tempestivitas*); so that the weakness (*infirmitas*) of childhood, the impetuosity (*ferocitas*) of youth, the seriousness (*gravitas*) of middle life, the maturity (*maturitas*) of old age — each bears some of Nature's fruit, which must be garnered in its own season".¹⁷

Age affects behaviour in a way similar to such factors as e.g. origin, rank, class, sex, social categories with which it is often mentioned in one and the same breath. "Men's seasons, like the year's, should have their different uses" quipped Plautus.¹⁸ Nonetheless, not everyone lived up to what was commonly expected of his age.

For example, it sometimes happened that an older person behaved like an insolent and unstable youngster, could not be relied upon and made a fool of himself. Such behaviour met with the strongest disapproval. What people were willing to tolerate in youngsters was deemed as ill befitting someone older: "An extravagant youth is misbehaving; an extravagant old man is mad; [...] One totters at the usual time, the other at an unusual time, one in his own time, the other in another's; one follows the lead of his years, the other kicks against his old age (*alter annos sequitur, alter senectuti sequitur*)".¹⁹

There is the possibility of "retarded development": that someone regresses to (or remains fixed in) the relative immaturity of

¹⁵ Cf. *JR* pp. 62-66.

¹⁶ Seneca, *Epistulae*, 121, 15-16.

¹⁷ Cicero, *Cato Maior*, 10, 33 (trans. W.A. Falconer). Cp. *ibid.*, 20, 76: "Boyhood has certain pursuits (*studia certa*): does youth (*adulscientes*) yearn for them? Early youth (*ineuns aetas*) has its pursuits: does the matured or so-called middle stage of life (*ea constans aetas, quae media dicitur*) need them? Maturity, too, has such as are not even sought in old age, and finally, there are those suitable to old age".

¹⁸ Plautus, *Mercator*, 984 (trans. P. Nixon). Cp. *JR* p. 63 n. 5-6.

¹⁹ Seneca the Elder, *Controversiae*, 2, 6, 4 (trans. M. Winterbottom). Cp. *JR* p. 64 with n. 7-10.

an earlier age. On the other hand it can also happen that a child or lad is mature beyond his years and manifests behaviour one would expect of an adult or an old man, that he gives the impression of seriousness, wisdom and authority which is in sharp contrast with his actual age. The *concordia aetatum*, the harmony between the ages, was posited by Cicero as the ideal.²⁰ Far more, however, than the "youthful old man" the *puer* or *adulescens senilis* was held in high esteem.²¹ Particularly in late antiquity this commonplace became extremely popular with pagans and Christians alike. Children or young men were esteemed precisely to the degree to which they did *not* behave like youngsters, but like mature people or old men, an attitude which is typical of a society in which the elders possessed authority and dignity, in which youth was not seen as an "ideal" but as an "incomplete", "defective" phase of life one has to grow out of as quickly as possible.

Yet it certainly was not always the case that such a "Wunderkind" was admired. It was Quintilian's conviction for example that a child should be a real child: "So let not the ripeness of vintage come too soon nor the must turn harsh while yet in the vat; thus it will last for years and mellow with age".²² Moreover people often worried about a youngster who was grown-up too soon, because it was generally believed that in such a case a boy was not promised a long life. "Those whom the gods love die young" said the age-old proverb.²³ In a letter of consolation written by Seneca to Marcia, we read: "Tell me, Marcia, when you saw in your son, youth that he was, the wisdom of an old man (*senilem in iuvene prudentiam*), a mind victorious over all sensual pleasures, did you think that you could long have the good fortune to keep him safe and unharmed? [...] Ripe maturity is the sign of an impending destruction; when growth stops, the end approaches (*indicium imminētis exitii nimia maturitas est; appetit finis, ubi incrementa consumpta sunt*)".²⁴

²⁰ Cicero, *Cato Maior*, 11,38: "For just as I approve of the young man in whom there is a touch of age (*adulescentem in quo est senile aliquid*), so I approve of the old man in whom there is some of the flavour of youth (*senem in quo est aliquid adulescentis*)" (trans. W.A. Falconer).

²¹ Cf. *JR* pp. 64-66 and especially C. Gnllka, *Aetas spiritalis: Die Überwindung der natürlichen Altersstufen als Ideal frühchristlichen Lebens* (Bonn, 1972) *passim*. Cp. T. Wiedemann, *Romans and Children*, *passim*.

²² Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, 2,4,9 (trans. H.E. Butler).

²³ Menander quoted by Plutarch, *Consolatio ad Apollonium*, 34,119 E. Cp. *JR* p. 66 n. 17.

²⁴ Seneca, *Consolatio ad Marciam*, 23,3-5 (trans. J.W. Basore).

C. YOUTH AS AN AGE OF CRISIS²⁵

People who speak of the "crisis of youth" usually refer to a troublesome period from a moral and psychological point of view. The young man, however, also goes through a mental "crisis".

1. Intellectually²⁶

With the onset of puberty the intellectual capacities of the average young man take on a new dimension. Psychologists such as J. Piaget point out that the perceptible, concrete thinking of a child grows into a capacity for imperceptible, theoretical thinking. The adolescent becomes able to abstract, to theorize, to reflect methodically and systematically, and becomes sensitive to the purpose and value of things.

The Ancients also believed that a capacity for logical thought emerged with puberty, i.e. at the age of fourteen. Ps.-Plutarch for example felt that a human being reached his completion (τελειότης) at that age. Just like trees, a man only becomes a complete human being once he begins to produce seed. At the same time as someone reaches puberty, he also develops the awareness of good and evil (ἐννοια καλοῦ τε καὶ κακοῦ) and can be trained to recognize the difference.²⁷

There is a yawning gap between childhood and puberty simply because a teenager is able to reason while the child is not. As Seneca writes: "A person, once a child, becomes a youth; his peculiar quality is transformed (*alia eius proprietates fit*); for the child could not reason, but the youth possesses reason (*ille enim irrationalis est, hic rationalis*). Certain things not only grow in size as they develop, but grow into something else (*in aliud*)".²⁸ Christian authors took over this opinion. Jerome for example speaks of the *interior homo*, the spiritual man, who is "born" at the age of fourteen and is so much better than the *exterior homo*, the carnal man who emerges from the mother's womb and predisposes him to evil.²⁹ With the onset of puberty a young person, in the opinion of

²⁵ Cf. *JR* pp. 66-80.

²⁶ Cf. *JR* pp. 66-71.

²⁷ Ps.-Plutarch, *Placita philosophorum*, 5,23,909 CD. Cp. *JR* p. 28 n. 82; pp. 66-67 with n. 23.

²⁸ Seneca, *Epistulae*, 118,14 (trans. R.M. Gummere). Cp. *JR* p. 68 n. 24.

²⁹ Jerome, *Commentarius in Ecclesiastem*, 4,13/16 CCL 72,288.

Augustine among others, reaches the "age of reason" (*rationales anni*) and he gains the insight into what justice and injustice are; although Augustine could not agree, many believed that one could only speak of sin "after the fourteenth year, with the onset of puberty (*ab anni quarti decimi articulo, cum pubescere coeperint*)".³⁰

The two aspects of puberty — physical maturity (*pubertas carnalis*) on the one hand, spiritual maturity (*pubertas animalis*) on the other — are linked by Tertullian in a remarkable text. Both awake at the age of fourteen. The latter manifests itself in an enrichment of the intellect, the former in the development of the body. Just as Adam and Eve felt the need to cover their genitals from the moment they knew the difference between good and evil, so the human being gets the same insight at the moment his sexual needs make themselves felt. On reaching this stage a person leaves behind a paradise, the paradise of innocence, and becomes tormented by new desires which are sinful.³¹

A youth can put his ability for logical thinking to a variety of uses. He regularly enjoys the use of this new capacity, he enthusiastically plunges into discussions or dialectical debate, he gets a kick simply out of thinking, and enjoys juggling with ideas. Just as in other fields, in this area, too, he wants to experiment playfully, to explore just how far he can go on, to discover how "skilful" he is. It might be opportune to illustrate this "*Spieltrieb*" by quoting a text of Plato's in which this phenomenon is exquisitely described. Apropos of a discussion about the unity-multiplicity problem, Socrates says: "Any young man, when he first has an inkling of this, is delighted, thinking he has found a treasure of wisdom; his joy fills him with enthusiasm; he joyously sets every possible argument in motion. Sometimes in one direction, rolling things up and kneading them into one, and sometimes again unrolling and dividing them; he gets himself into a muddle first and foremost, then anyone who happens to be near him, whether he be younger or older or of his own age; he spares neither father nor mother nor any human being who can hear, and hardly even the lower animals".³²

And yet a young man does not always want to use his intellect as a (powerful) plaything. It is not only a source of joy. A youth will also employ his mind to get insight into his personal destiny. At this

³⁰ Augustine, *Epistulae*, 180,2 PL 33,778; Idem, *De genesi ad litteram*, 10,13 CSEL 28,1,311. Cp. *JR* pp. 67-68 with n. 24.

³¹ Tertullian, *De anima*, 38,1-2 CCL 2,840-841.

³² Plato, *Philebus*, 5,15D-16A (trans. H.N. Fowler).

point we will consider only the myth of Heracles at the crossroads and the allegorical letter Y which symbolically represent this urge of youth.

"When Heracles was passing from boyhood to youth's estate, wherein the young, now becoming their own masters, show whether they will approach life by the path of virtue or the path of vice, he went out into a quiet place, and sat pondering which road to take." Thus begins in Xenophon the famous myth of Heracles at the crossroads, a story which found its way into Latin literature thanks to Cicero.³³ While the young hero was lost in thought, two women approached him. The one, Virtue, was very simply dressed and was modesty itself. The other, Vice, was expensively dolled up and looked snooty and meretricious. Both approached Heracles and tried to win him over. The hero did not allow himself to be charmed by the tempting prattle of Vice but opted resolutely for Virtue, the long, hard road.

There is considerable resemblance between this myth and the symbolic representation of human life as the letter Y³⁴ attributed to Pythagoras. Initially the course of life is linear: a child is neither committed to virtue, nor to vice, being restrained by the fear of his father or his teacher. At the dawn of adolescence (and logical thinking) every young man is confronted with a bifurcation and has a moment's hesitation as to the life he would wish to lead. The path leading to the left is broad and easy, but leads to vice, to pleasure, to wastefulness, to idleness and finally entails disgrace and utter misery. The path leading to the right, although steep, uneven and difficult, brings glory and peace of mind to those who reach the top. Virtue can only be reached at the expense of great effort, through the study of philosophy, and under the supervision of a wise guide.

In both the myth of Heracles and the allegorical Y the choice between good and evil is clearly situated at the inception of puberty. Both tales seem to us to be symbols of a psychological reality. The young man at that period of life becomes aware of good and evil. He is unsure of himself, cuts himself off and seeks isolation (*exisse in solitudinem*) so as to reflect deeply and at length (*diu secum multumque dubitasse*) about his destiny and the best way of living:

³³ Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, 2,1,21 ff.; Cicero, *De officiis*, 1,32,117-118. Cp. *JR* pp. 69-71.

³⁴ E.g. Lactantius, *Divinae institutiones*, 6,3,6 ff. CSEL 19,486.

*utram viam ingredi melius est.*³⁵ He will often turn left and follow the road of passion, enjoyment and easy pleasure. Yet it is also possible that he will turn right and pledge himself with his whole heart to someone — or something — in which he believes.

2. Morally³⁶

It was the opinion of the Ancients that youth primarily was *the* critical age of human life, a period of storm and stress, of tensions and conflicts. The young man, according to Horace, was "soft as wax for moulding to evil"³⁷, his age was "suspect"³⁸, and a writer like Ps.-Plutarch illustrates it copiously: "I have often expressed my utter disapprobation of men [parents] who have been responsible for the introduction of depraved habits. For, while it is true that they have put attendants and teachers in charge of their children, they nevertheless have allowed the impetuosity of youth (*τὴν τῶν μεираκίων ὀρμὴν*) to range unrestrained, when they ought, on the contrary, to have exercised greater caution and watchfulness over them when they were young men than when they were children. For who is not aware that the faults of children are trivial and altogether corrigible — heedlessness, perhaps, towards their attendants, or deceiving and refusing to mind their teachers? But the iniquities of youth are often monstrous and wicked (*ὑπερφυῖα καὶ σχέτλια*) — unlimited gluttony, theft of parents' money, gambling, revels, drinking-bouts, love affairs with young girls, and corruption of married women. The impulses of young men should therefore be kept fettered and restrained by careful supervision. For life's prime is prodigal in its pleasures, restive, and in need of a curb, so that parents who do not take hold of the reins with a firm hand at this period of life, are manifestly, by their folly, giving to their sons licence for wrongdoing. Wise fathers ought, therefore, especially during this time (*παρὰ τοῦτον μάλιστα τὸν καιρόν*), to be vigilant and alert".³⁹

³⁵ Cicero, *De officiis*, 1,32,118. Cp. *JR* p. 70 n. 35. The "thinking" youthful Lysiteles in Plautus, *Trinummus*, pp. 223 ff. parodies young Heracles. Cf. *JR* pp. 70-71 with n. 36.

³⁶ Cf. *JR* pp. 72-80.

³⁷ Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 163.

³⁸ Therefore the *adulescentia* is a *suspecta aetas*. Cf. Valerius Maximus, *Facta et dicta memorabilia*, 8,1,12 and *JR* p. 72 n. 39.

³⁹ Ps.-Plutarch, *De liberis educandis*, 16,12 AC (trans. F.C. Rabbitt).

It comes as no surprise that Christian authors also stress the moral perils involved in growing up. For a Church Father like Ambrose there can be no doubt that *adulescentia* is the most critical age, whereas the other phases of life are much less "dangerous". Childhood is the age of innocence, old age that of wisdom, and the adult takes care of his good name and feels ashamed of sin. "Only youth is weak of strength, feeble of insight, aglow with vice, averse to admonitions, an easy victim to refined pleasures."⁴⁰ In the Eastern world John Chrysostom's view of the matter is not positive either. He compares life to a sea. After having pointed out that during childhood the character is far from formed with parents and teachers still standing in the wings, he continues: "After this age succeeds the ocean of youth, where the winds are violent as in the Aegean, lust increasing upon us. And this age especially is destitute of correction; not only because he is beset more fiercely, but also because his faults are not reprov'd, for both teacher and guide have now withdrawn. When therefore the winds blow more fiercely, and the pilot is more feeble, and there is no helper, consider the greatness of the tempest".⁴¹

Youth undoubtedly is a critical age. It is a stormy sea, an untamed animal, a sort of madness...⁴² In the defense of his youthful friend Caelius, Cicero compares human life to a racehorse. *Adulescentia* is the *flexus aetatis*, the dangerous corner in the course of human life. Just as at races in the circus where horses have problems negotiating the turning point (*spina*) and often falter there, so, too, a youth will encounter temporary difficulties before he gets back onto the straight and narrow path. It was the great orator's claim that this is exactly what happened to his client Caelius. His reputation was imperilled as a young man by his affair with the famous (and infamous) Clodia, by the fascination and the novelty of all sorts of passions exercised upon him. After that "intermezzo", this young man will change his way of living and, as is so often the case, become a "solid citizen".

It is worth noting that in this context the normally severe Cicero is — or at least pretends to be — of the opinion that passions should

⁴⁰ Ambrose, *De interpellatione Iob et David*, 1,7,21 CSEL 32,2,224: *adulescentia sola est invalida viribus, infirma consiliis, vitio calens, fastidiosa monitoribus, inlecebrosa deliciis*. Cp. *JR* p. 73 n. 43.

⁴¹ John Chrysostom, *Commentarius in Matthaeum*, 81,5 PG 58,737 (trans. P. Schaff). Cp. *JR* p. 73 n. 44.

⁴² References in *JR* p. 73 n. 44; 74 n. 47.

be allowed to burn themselves out: "After they [the passions] have been under somewhat long restraint and during early youth curbed and controlled [by educators], pleasures quite often suddenly break loose and burst out in a flood". The great orator also points out that it is inevitable that a youth should suffer from all kinds of shortcomings, "for many are the allurements to which nature of her own accord has given birth, such as can lull virtue to rest at times and cause her to relax her vigilance; she has put before the young many slippery paths (*multas vias adolescentiae lubricas*), on which they can scarcely keep their footing or even enter without falling or stumbling".⁴³

It will be clear from this text how youth was considered as the "slippery" age (*lubrica aetas, lubricum aetatis*). This expression, doubtlessly under the inspiration of Cicero, often keeps cropping up in references to youth, in both secular and Christian literature, and even in legal texts.⁴⁴

D. EDUCATORS — THE SEVERE AND THE SOFT-HEARTED⁴⁵

It will already be apparent that there could be divergent attitudes to the *lubricum aetatis*. On the one hand there were those like Ps.-Plutarch, whose views have just been outlined above, who condemned the sins of the young, the *vitia aetatis*⁴⁶, in the strongest possible language, and believed that one had to take every possible step to keep this age group in check and give it the guidance it required. Even the humane Pliny was convinced that "the slippery age" (*lubricum aetatis*) not only needed a teacher but also a supervisor and even someone who would give a sense of direction to his life (*non praeceptor modo sed custos etiam rectorque*).⁴⁷

Normally people agreed that a young man needed guidance even after he had put on the adult toga. And yet people were generally tolerant and forgiving in their attitude to the shortcomings of the young. It was common to speak of the "sins", "errors", "slipping", "game", "jokes" involved in being young.⁴⁸ Parents should remember they had not behaved any better when they were young them-

⁴³ Cicero, *Pro Caelio*, 31,75; 17,41 (trans. R. Gardner).

⁴⁴ References in *JR* pp. 74-75 n. 48, 49, 50, 51.

⁴⁵ Cf. *JR* pp. 75-80.

⁴⁶ E.g. Suetonius, *Nero*, 26,1. Cp. *JR* p. 75 n. 52.

⁴⁷ Pliny, *Epistulae*, 3,3,4.

⁴⁸ References in *JR* pp. 75-76 with n. 52 ff.

selves.⁴⁹ It was indeed his age which led a youngster to slip and Cicero — and many with him — felt that no one would be such a spoil-sport as to deny a young man his kicks: *datur enim concessu omnium huic aliqui ludus aetati*.⁵⁰

Advocates of a "humane" approach to the young were convinced that a number of deficiencies of youth were not really malicious, that they were part and parcel of being young, thus perfectly normal and unavoidable, that by provoking little or no reaction potential damage could be contained and that ultimately the faults and failings of the young would correct themselves without an iron fist being applied. After a while, when a young man has sown his wild oats, he is overcome with remorse, starts to apply common sense and ends up on the straight and narrow path again.⁵¹ This was considered a "law of nature". It was also an obligation for every youth one day or other to conform to the standards of "the establishment". Thus Cicero again, who speaks as a barrister, of course, but certainly could not allow himself to talk nonsense: "Let some allowance be made to age; let youth be allowed greater freedom; let not pleasures always be forbidden; let not that upright and unbending reason always prevail; let desire and pleasure sometimes triumph over reason. [...] When he has listened to the voice of pleasure and given some time to love affairs and these empty desires of youth (*ad ludum aetatis atque ad inanis hasce adolescentiae cupiditates*), let him at length turn to the interests of home life, to activity at the bar and in public affairs, so that all those pursuits the vanity of which reason had previously failed to reveal, he may show that he has abandoned from satiety and found contemptible through experience (*satietae abieciisse, experiendo contempsisse*)".⁵²

These words of Cicero's are rather remarkable. It is quite normal to stray from the right way as a young person and to find one's way back almost automatically without the "crisis" necessarily doing any permanent damage. The eccentric behaviour of a young man appears as a sort of experimentation with different life styles. A moment will be reached when enough is enough and the youngster will see that he has to mend his ways. He will capitulate to the "establishment" and take up his duties as a father, politician or orator.

⁴⁹ Cp. *JR* p. 77 n. 68.

⁵⁰ Cicero, *Pro Caelio*, 12,28. Cp. *JR* p. 76 n. 58.

⁵¹ References in *JR* pp. 78-79 n. 63-72.

⁵² Cicero, *Pro Caelio*, 18,42 (trans. R. Gardner).

"The fault, which time has set up, time will take away", said the proverb.⁵³ The best proof of this "law of nature" is that many people had anything but an exemplary youth and grew up to become sound, even prominent citizens. "I have indeed" (Cicero once more) "known and heard of many in this country who had not only taken a little sip of this kind of life, and touched it, as the proverb says, with the tips of their fingers, but who have given up their youth entirely to sensuality, who have at length risen to the surface and, as they say, turned over a new leaf (*se ad bonam frugem recepisse*) and have become respectable and distinguished men (*gravisque homines atque inlustis*). [...] Their failings were afterwards so covered over by numerous virtues, that anyone who wished could excuse them on the plea of youth (*adulescentiae excusatione*)."⁵⁴

It was only to be expected that a young man should pass through a rather difficult and critical period while growing up. It has been seen how some people could be advanced beyond their years, how they could act like adults or old men even at a very early age. Such youngsters apparently did not pass through a "dangerous" phase of life, behaving in a way which defied what was generally expected of "normal" juveniles. The exceptions, however, confirmed the rule, i.e. that youth was "a slippery age" (*lubrica aetas*), something one could regret or accept. It was extremely rare for the positive aspects of this phenomenon to be highlighted. Yet another passage from Cicero's plea in favour of Caelius is worth considering here. The famous advocate defends not only his friend's pursuit of luxury and amorous adventures — of such things people were generally rather tolerant — but above all else his ambition, thus casting the supremacy of the intellect in a relative light and pointing out the value of the transitional age that was (or at least could be) youth. An impetuous and turbulent youth could be evidence of a dynamic personality, a sign of great promise for the future. The orator allows himself to be carried away by his affection for his client and friend, and does his very best to have him acquitted. And yet the following words are not just barrister's bluff: it is the real Cicero we hear, as much as in his philosophical writings in which he ardently preaches the repression of all passions. In his peroration the advocate concedes that Caelius did not always behave as one might

⁵³ Syrus, *Sententiae*, 566: *quod aetas vitium posuit aetas auferet*. But see *ibid.*, 649: "Wisdom is found by sense, not years (*sensus, non aetas, invenit sapientiam*)" (trans. J.W. Duff).

⁵⁴ Cicero, *Pro Caelio*, 12,28; 18,43 (trans. R. Gardner). Cp. *JR* p. 78 n. 73.

have wished, and continues: "I am not speaking about [Caelius'] good sense, a quality which does not belong to his years; I am speaking about his impetuosity, his eagerness to win, his ardent desire for glory. Such passions, in men who have reached our time of life, ought to be somewhat restrained, but in youth, as with wild plants, they give promise of what virtue in its ripeness and how great the fruits of industry will some day be. Why, young men of great talent always need to be checked rather than encouraged in the quest of distinction; youth is an age when, if it is beginning to display exuberance in its intellectual gifts, pruning rather than grafting is needed. Wherefore, if anyone thinks that Caelius' energy, spirit, obstinacy, either in beginning or in carrying on his enmities, have been too ardent (*nimum efferbuisse*), or if any of even these trifles give some offence, his shade of purple, his hosts of friends, his sparkle, his brilliance — all this feverishness, you will find, will soon have cooled down (*iam ista deferbuerint*); age, experience and time will have mellowed all (*iam aetas omnia, iam res, iam dies mitigarit*)".⁵⁵

E. WHY WAS YOUTH REPUTEDLY SO LACKING IN VIRTUE?⁵⁶

Youth is the *lubricum aetatis*, the crisis period of human life. How did the Ancients explain this fact? A distinction must be drawn between the influence of surroundings and purely internal developments, factors which flow from the specific mental, physical, psychological and emotional attributes of an adolescent.

1. Social factors⁵⁷

Roman antiquity was well aware of the influence of society on youth. There was a general acknowledgment that the "crisis" which so many of the young normally went through could be explained by environmental factors. *Adulescentia* began with the assumption of the adult toga (*toga virilis*), it ended with the inauguration of a political career and/or marriage. The one brought with it freedom and leisure, the other distinguished responsibility. Apart from these

⁵⁵ Cicero, *Pro Caelio*, 31,76-77 (trans. R. Gardner).

⁵⁶ Cf. *JR* pp. 80-110.

⁵⁷ Cf. *JR* pp. 80-94.

elements there were further social factors which could influence the intensity of the crisis in varying degrees.

*a. Freedom — the most serious danger*⁵⁸

The Romans themselves linked the beginning of the crisis period with assuming the adult toga and the freedom which from that time on became the young man's privilege.

Not everyone was quite so shy about this new acquisition as Persius. This young poet remembers how he had once set away the *toga praetexta* and the *bullae*, custodians of his childhood years, and had donned the adult toga, not without a certain trepidation (*mihi pavidō*). He was now free from his pedagogue and allowed to wander round the Subura area — notorious for its ladies of easy virtue — together with his charming friends (*blandi comites*). He did not know, however, what to do with his new-found freedom and, ill at ease (*trepidās mentes*), he stood at the crossroads of his life⁵⁹ and saw a new world open before him. Looking for something or somebody to hold on he threw himself completely and unconditionally on Cornutus (*me tibi seposui*), a Stoic philosopher in whom he found a true guide and mentor.⁶⁰

Most youths doubtlessly were less timid than Persius. For many, a rather negative chapter in their personal development opened with the assumption of the toga. "Whom hath not unrestrained youth (*pubes effrena*) corrupted, and the too hasty freedom of the gown (*novaeque libertas properata togae*)!" cried a young man in a poem of Statius.⁶¹ The fact that many were not in a fit state to integrate this new-found freedom is eloquently brought out by the words with which Plutarch introduces his tract "On listening to lectures", a treatise written for the young Nicander who had just reached adulthood: "[I send you this tract] so that you may know how rightly to listen to the voice of persuasion, now that you are no longer subject to authority, having assumed the male toga. Now absence of control, which some of the young men, for want of education, think to be freedom, establishes the sway of a set of

⁵⁸ Cf. *JR* pp. 80-84.

⁵⁹ *Cumque iter ambiguum est et vitae nescius error/ deducit trepidas ramosa in compita mentes* (vv. 34-35). The allusion to the letter Y as a symbol of human life is clear.

⁶⁰ Persius, *Saturae*, 5,30 ff.

⁶¹ Statius, *Silvae*, 5,2,68-69 (trans. J.H. Mozley).

masters, harsher than the teachers and attendants of childhood, in the form of the desires, which are now, as it were, unchained. [...] As soon as they lay aside the garb of childhood, they lay aside also their sense of modesty and fear, and, undoing the habit that invests them, straightway become full of unruliness. But you have often heard that to follow God and to obey reason are the same thing, and so I ask you to believe that in persons of good sense the passing from childhood to manhood is not a casting off of control, but a recasting of the controlling agent, since instead of some hired person or slave purchased with money they now take as the divine guide of their life reason, whose followers alone may deservedly be considered free".⁶²

The young man's freedom was more often than not strictly limited as long as his father lived. When the latter died on the eve of his son's puberty, the dangers to which a lad was exposed were particularly great. This fact is clearly illustrated by the rhetorical description the Syrian Herodian (second century) gives us of the concern which the dying Marcus Aurelius felt about what might happen to his son Commodus after his death. The Emperor was afraid that the youth "would grow up in control of absolute, unchecked power without parental authority" and — as a result — might devote his time to drunken debauchery and a life of pleasure for "young men's passions are easily diverted from learning moral values". Marcus remembered a whole series of young emperors — e.g. Nero — who abused their power in a scandalous fashion. Now that he was on his deathbed he called all his confidants together and asked them to be particularly attentive to his son who was now at such a difficult age: "Here is my son, whom you yourself brought up, who has just reached the age of adolescence and stands in need of guides through the tempest and storm of life (*ἄρτι τῆς μεираκίῳν ἡλικίας ἐπιβαίνοντα καὶ [...] ὥσπερ ἐν χειμῶνι καὶ ζάλῃ*). There is a danger that he will be carried away and dashed against the rock of evil habits because he has an imperfect experience of what to do".⁶³

⁶² Plutarch, *Quomodo adolescens poetas audire debeat*, 1,37 CE (trans. F.C. Babbitt).

⁶³ Herodian, *Ab excessu divi Marci*, 1,3-4 (trans. C.R. Whittaker). Cp. *JR* p. 84 n. 83. The historicity of this episode is uncertain, but this is not relevant for our study; a father is described in a way one expects him to behave.

b. Other factors which influenced the crisis⁶⁴

At the beginning of this paper we explained how certain laws which came into effect round 200 B.C. — the *Lex [P]laetoria* and the *Lex Villia annalis* — provided for a sort of "bridge" between the years of childhood and full adulthood, between physical and social maturity.⁶⁵ Thus one can say that Roman legislation allowed youth to benefit from being young.

When the shock of the second Punic War (218-201 B.C.) had become a thing of the past, Rome was inundated with Greek culture, particularly after the battle of Pydna (168 B.C.). The new capital of the world reached a hitherto unknown level of prosperity. It goes without saying that the new situation deeply influenced the youth of the day. This is evidenced through the following testimony from the historian Polybius, who, after having described the young Scipio's exemplary behaviour, contrasts it with the excesses of most young people in those days for which he gives a penetrating explanation: "For some of them had abandoned themselves to amours with boys and others to the society of courtesans, and many to musical entertainments and banquets, and the extravagance they involve, having in the course of the war with Perseus been speedily infected by the Greek laxity in these respects. So great in fact was the incontinence that had broken out among the young men in such matters, that many paid a talent for a male favourite and many three hundred drachmas for a jar of caviar. [...] It was just at the period we are treating of that this present tendency to extravagance declared itself, first of all because they thought that now after the fall of the Macedonian kingdom their universal dominion was undisputed, and next because after the riches of Macedonia had

⁶⁴ Cf. *JR* pp. 84-90.

⁶⁵ See also J.-P. Néraudeau, *La jeunesse dans la littérature et les institutions de la Rome républicaine* (Paris, 1979) pp. 364-365: "In the second century B.C. a class of adolescents arose" (my trans.); L. Giuliano, *Gioventù e istituzioni nella Roma antica* (Roma, 1979) pp. 34; 73-77: "The social maturity, which in the 5th and 4th centuries B.C. was still automatically attained at puberty and socially coincided with its official recognition by the assumption of the *toga virilis*, from the 2nd century on was fully acquired at the age of twenty-five; whereby the young puber was only recognized to be mature for the purposes of defending his fatherland, not for administering with fulness of judgement his own patrimony and state" (my trans.).

been transported to Rome there was a great display of wealth both in public and in private".⁶⁶

The "crisis" which marked the adolescence of many youths was a side effect of a flourishing society. This partially explains why it was especially the youngsters of the city⁶⁷, and not so much those from villages or the countryside, who went through this troublesome phase of life, and even within urban centers, this phenomenon was mainly confined to youngsters from the leisured classes. The Ancients were only too well aware of this fact. A lad from a wealthy background was allowed far more than a contemporary of lower social rank who was inserted into the economic process at an early age and simply never had the chance to abandon himself to the *vitia fortunae*. Nicolaus of Damascus makes this clear saying that the young Augustus behaved in an exemplary fashion, "at the very age at which youths, particularly those of wealth (*μᾶλλον οἱ εὐτυχεῖς*), are most wanton (*μάλιστα σφριγῶσιν*)".⁶⁸

A youngster's milieu shapes his way of being young in no uncertain manner. An important explanation for the eccentric behaviour of many youths lies in the fact that they enjoyed a great deal of free time (*otium*). As soon as the great wars were over, most young men of rank did not feel attracted to the army and they had to wait until they were twenty-five or thirty before they could enjoy their full rights in civil law or be given political responsibility. They had thus a great deal of free time and every opportunity to develop their own life style. The *otium*, leisure, the living for himself, free from the burdens of public responsibilities often appears as the most important explanation of the troubles which were so characteristic of a young person's growing years.⁶⁹ A young man like Catullus was all too aware that his *otium* was very likely to cause his ruination: "Idleness, Catullus, does you harm, you riot in your

⁶⁶ Polybius, *Historiae*, 31,25,2 ff. (trans. W.R. Paton). Cp. *JR* p. 85 n. 86. For an (idealized) description of "serious" youth in earlier times, cf. Sallust, *De Catilinae coniuratione*, 7,4-5; Pliny, *Epistulae*, 8,14,4 ff.; Idem, *Panegyricus in Traianum*, 81,2.

⁶⁷ E.g. Sallust, *De bello lugurthino*, 63,3; Seneca, *Epistulae*, 50,3. According to the Ancients youths in (big) cities were threatened by theatre, erotic poetry and pictures, youthful beauty itself, philosophical systems such as Epicureanism, money, corrupt public life... References in *JR* pp. 85-86 n. 88-99; p. 89 n. 110.

⁶⁸ Nicolaus of Damascus, *Vita Caesaris*, 15 (trans. C.M. Hall).

⁶⁹ Cf. *JR* p. 86 with n. 96.

idleness and wanton too much. Idleness ere now has ruined both kings and wealthy cities".⁷⁰

The intensity of a particular youth's crisis years also greatly depended on the education he had received as a child, on the way he had been reared as a young man.⁷¹ The Ancients were aware that by undue severity parents could put the filial affection of their children at risk: "There his children hold a sire's life cheap where rather feared than honoured he would be (*ubi malunt metui quam vereri se ab suis*)"⁷²; yet they saw at the same time that an overly lax upbringing inevitably led to a fiasco. Thus, for example, a father in the Elder Seneca came to realize that he himself was entirely responsible for the misbehaviour of his son: "He was too indulgently brought up; he thinks he may do anything; he has never asked me anything".⁷³

The "slippery age" was bound to be affected by the people with whom a young man was associated. Older people — especially flatterers — could be "bad company"⁷⁴ and Christian writers even went so far as to advise the young to avoid the company of their peers and to associate with virtuous people who were older.⁷⁵

"When seniors blunder, juniors learn but ill."⁷⁶ It was the Romans' view that not only parents but all elders should set the young a good example. Their behaviour, however, was often anything but exemplary and this fact was, in Cicero's view, disastrous for the young: "Luxury, a vice in any time of life, is in old age especially scandalous. But if excess in sensual indulgence is added to luxurious living, it is a twofold evil; for old age not only disgraces itself; it also serves to make the excesses of the young more shameless (*facit adulescentium impudentiorem intemperantiam*)".⁷⁷ Probably the worst fact of all was that many older people simply did not dare to exercise their responsibilities as educators: they were terrified by the young, found excuses for their short-

⁷⁰ Catullus, *Carmina*, 51,13-16 (trans. F.W. Cornish).

⁷¹ Cf. E. Eyben, "Fathers and Sons", in: Beryl Rawson (Ed.), *Marriage, Divorce and Children in Ancient Rome* (Oxford, 1991) pp. 114-143.

⁷² Afranius, in: Gellius, *Noctes atticae*, 15,13,3 (trans. J.C. Rolfe). Cp. *JR* p. 88 n. 106.

⁷³ Seneca the Elder, *Controversiae*, 2,3,3 (trans. M. Winterbottom). Cp. *JR* p. 88 n. 107; Eyben, "Fathers and Sons", p. 129 ff.

⁷⁴ Ps.-Plutarch, *De Liberis educandis*, 17,13 AC. Cp. *JR* pp. 87-88 with n. 102.

⁷⁵ E.g. Jerome, *Epistulae*, 123,14. Cp. *JR* p. 87 with n. 101.

⁷⁶ Syrus, *Sententiae*, 703 (trans. J.W. Duff): *ubi peccat aetas maior, male discit minor*.

⁷⁷ Cicero, *De Officiis*, 1,34,123 (trans. W. Miller). Cp. *JR* p. 89 n. 109.

comings, did not dare upbraid them, desired to accommodate themselves at every turn... These are precisely the attitudes which Laelius, following in Plato's footsteps, complains about in Cicero's *The Republic*: "The father fears his son, the son flouts his father, all sense of shame disappears, and all is so absolutely free that there is no distinction between citizen and alien; the schoolmaster fears and flatters his pupils, and pupils despise their masters; youths take on the gravity of age, and old men stoop to the games of youth (*ludus adulescentium*), for fear they may be disliked by their juniors and seem to them too serious (*ne sint iis odiosi et graves*)".⁷⁸

*c. Factors which helped end the crisis period*⁷⁹

Freedom, money, leisure... With the onset of puberty the young man came into a strange, new world which he wished to explore and then become used to. A poor upbringing and bad example set by his elders did not help make things easier for him. After some time, however, his "awkward age" would be a thing of the past. Marriage⁸⁰ and the pursuit of a political career could help him to put the past behind him.

Roman girls of the well-to-do classes married at a (very) early age (mostly between twelve and fifteen) but most males were much older (on average nine years) when marrying⁸¹ — if they married at all. From this point of view, they had the occasion to be young. But all good things come to an end...

Throughout Roman antiquity marriage was viewed as a sign of frugality, *frugalitas*. This fact emerges clearly from the comedies of Terence and Plautus which often hinge on the plot of a youth being in love with a girl whose status makes marriage impossible. The father initially does not bother to object to his son's love affair; yet he does expect his darling, when the day comes, to swap his dearly beloved for a "worthy" spouse. The youngster is far from enthusiastic, but then something happens which virtually never happened

⁷⁸ Cicero, *De republica*, 1,43,67 (trans. C.W. Keyes). Cp. Plato, *Respublica*, 8, 562E-563 B and Eyben, "Fathers and Sons", p. 125 ff. (on spoilt children).

⁷⁹ Cf. *JR* pp. 90-94.

⁸⁰ Cf. *JR* pp. 90-92.

⁸¹ Cf. M.K. Hopkins, "The Age of Roman Girls at Marriage", *Population Studies*, 18 (1965) pp. 309-327; B.D. Shaw, "The Age of Roman Girls at Marriage: Some Reconsiderations", *Journal of Roman Studies*, 77 (1987) pp. 30-46 (a higher age of marriage in the lower classes); R.P. Saller, "Men's Age at Marriage and Its Consequences in the Roman Family", *Classical Philology*, 82 (1987) pp. 21-34.

in reality: it transpires that the girl is from good family and a love match is possible...

In Terence's *The Brothers*, a father is under the illusion that his son had been reconciled to the inevitable marriage and that his youthful pranks are at an end: "At last only the other day, weary, I suppose, of them all he announced a desire to marry. I hoped his hot blood had cooled down (*defervisse*)".⁸² In the same comedian's *The Lady of Andros* young Pamphilus is of the opinion that his father Simo is unreasonable and wants to bind him to a lawful wife at too early an age: "Father", he says, "you have yourself fixed the time for these things to end; the day is at hand when I must suit my life to another's way (*alieno more*); till then let me live my own (*meo modo*)". Simo was not at all put out by the fact that his son had made the best of his youth. Yet he did feel that the time had now come for the lad to start thinking about settling down. Davos, the slave, tried to convince his master that Pamphilus had reconciled himself to the paternal wish: "In fact he has reckoned it in his own mind on the right lines. [...] So long as he might, so long as his years suited it (*dum licitum est ei dumque aetas tulit*), he had a love-affair. What's more he kept it dark. He was careful that the incident shouldn't ever spoil his good name, as a man of character ought. Now it's time he took a wife, and to a wife he has turned his thoughts". Simo was of course hearing what he wanted to hear, but in fact his son had no desire whatever to swap his girl friend for a perfect stranger. He then tried to use a supposed tiff between the lovers to force a wife on his son. He addressed his friend Chremes, father of the candidate-wife, in the following words: "Let us give him a wife. I hope that the tie of association and marriage with a gentlewoman will make it easy for my son to escape from this sea of evil". Chremes initially agreed, yet was quick to regret his promise: "You have driven me, when there was a young man preoccupied in a love-affair, averse from matrimony, to agree to his marrying my daughter, a plunge into discord and unstable wedlock, that her trouble and her pain might be the drug to cure your son (*gnato ut medicarer tuo*)".⁸³

Marriage often had — or was supposed to have — a "curative" effect. This was a general conviction, and it was not only in the theatre that one could hear such words. Cicero's daughter Tullia married Dolabella. The orator was not terribly enthusiastic about this marriage, arranged as it was by mother and daughter, but he banked

⁸² Terence, *Adelphoe*, 150-153 (trans. J. Sargeant).

⁸³ Terence, *Andria*, 151 ff.; 443 ff.; 560 ff.; 828 ff. (trans. J. Sargeant).

on Dolabella improving under Tullia's influence.⁸⁴ Statius related a story about a young man who stopped misbehaving once he married: he embraced the married state eagerly and willingly and happily submitted to the reins (*frena*) of matrimony.⁸⁵ At the close of antiquity, Augustine was disconcerted by the fact that his parents during his early youth were only interested in his studies and did not compel him to marry and thus put an end once and for all to his turbulent youth (*ut usque ad coniugale litus exaestuarent fluctus aetatis meae*).⁸⁶

One thing is clear: Romans perceived marriage as putting a damper on a dissolute life. It put an end to the freedom and libertine life style of a young man. People like Terence believed that with marriage another life (*alia vita*) began, that new morals (*alii mores*) were embraced and that a young man ended up on the straight and narrow path (*redire in viam*).⁸⁷ Ps.-Plutarch saw marriage as the best remedy for "hopeless cases": "An effort should be made to yoke in marriage those who cannot resist their desires, and who are deaf to admonitions. For marriage is the most secure bond for youth (*δεσμός γὰρ οὗτος τῆς νεότητος ἀσφαλέστατος*)".⁸⁸ The patristic writers were of the same opinion and held it even more strongly than their pagan counterparts. They were extremely apprehensive about the "youthful passions" and for that very reason insisted on early marriage for all, boys included. John Chrysostom, for example, wrote how passions erupted with a virulent intensity at the age of fifteen and were very difficult to keep under control. Therefore, he said, "if you do bring your son up to the secular life, introduce his bride to him straightway and do not wait for him to be a soldier or engaged in political life before you do so. [...] Bind him then with this fetter, the fetter that makes virtue secure. Then, even if he cannot have a wife from his earliest manhood, let him have a betrothed from the first and let him strive to show himself a good man".⁸⁹

The fact of having a real profession evidently reduces the chances of being "really" young. For Roman upper-class youths,

⁸⁴ Cicero, *Ad familiares*, 8,13,1.

⁸⁵ Statius, *Silvae*, 3,5,24-28.

⁸⁶ Augustine, *Confessiones*, 2,2,3.

⁸⁷ Terence, *Andria*, 189-190.

⁸⁸ Ps.-Plutarch, *De liberis educandis*, 19,13 F (trans. F.C. Babbitt). Cp. *JR* p. 92 n. 119.

⁸⁹ John Chrysostom, *De inani gloria*, 76; 81-82 (trans. M.L.W. Laistner). Cp. *JR* p. 92 n. 120 and Eyben, "Geschlechtsreife und Ehe", pp. 438-439.

careers in the army and/or in politics were traditionally the main options. That a period in the army accelerated the attaining of maturity is evident, and explicitly attested in the case of Marius.⁹⁰ Offices in the army, however, became less and less attractive for aristocratic youths from ca. 200 B.C. on.⁹¹ The same cannot be said about politics, at least during the Republic.⁹²

In those days, virtually every youngster of rank dreamt of a political career. Originally there was no minimum age for entry into the political arena and one was deemed qualified from the time of assuming the adult toga.⁹³ As we have seen above, the *Lex Villia annalis* changed all that, and henceforth a youth had to wait far into his twenties before he could start his *cursus honorum*. When commenting upon this law Cicero declared that it was implemented out of fear of "the rashness of youth", the *adulescentiae temeritas*.⁹⁴ Pacatus, a fourth-century Gallic panegyrist, found it — in his rhetorical style — a most sensible rule, because "even people who [as adults] followed the path of virtue staggered or even fell on the slippery paths of youth (*lubricum aetatis*). Has riotous living (*luxuria*) not claimed the most famous men of Rome for some time, — I mean a Sulla, a Catulus, a Scipio? Although more favourable winds brought them to a safe haven, they were once drowning and shipwrecked young men rolled back and forth by the hurricanes of passions till their age (*aetas*) freed them — not easily! — from the extravagances which threatened to submerge them".⁹⁵

"Lads and young men are turned away from public affairs by those who are wise."⁹⁶ These words were no "wishful thinking" of Plutarch. They corresponded to reality in Greek⁹⁷ as well as Roman society. The Romans (and Greeks) had a healthy fear of a young

⁹⁰ Cf. Sallust, *De bello lugurthino*, 63,3: "Having been born and reared at Arpinum, where he had spent all his boyhood, he had no sooner reached the age for military life than he had given himself the training of active service, not of Grecian eloquence or the elegance of the city. Thus engrossed in wholesome pursuits his unspoiled nature soon matured (*brevi adolevit*)" (trans. J.C. Rolfe).

⁹¹ Cf. Eyben, "Was the Roman 'Youth' an 'Adult' Socially?", p. 345 ff. and, especially, J. Suolahti, *The Junior Officers of the Roman Army in the Republican Period* (Helsinki, 1955) passim.

⁹² Cf. *JR*, pp. 92-94.

⁹³ Cf. Tacitus, *Annales*, 11,22,4.

⁹⁴ Cicero, *Philippicae*, 5,17,47.

⁹⁵ *Panegyrici latini*, 12,7,2-4. Cp. *JR* p. 78 with n. 73; p. 93 n. 122.

⁹⁶ Plutarch, *An seni respublica gerenda sit*, 2,784 C (trans. H.N. Fowler).

⁹⁷ Cf. P. Roussel, "Etude sur le principe de l'ancienneté dans le monde hellénique du Ve siècle av. J.C. à l'époque romaine", *Monuments et mémoires publiés par l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 43 (1951) pp. 123-227.

man's ambition, rashness, audacity, impetuosity, arrogance, insolence, inexperience...⁹⁸ and were thus reluctant to entrust serious civil and political responsibilities to him. It is clear, however, that precisely for that reason — because a youngster was not normally considered a "finished product" and taken seriously — tensions were created and a juvenile might try to affirm himself in a less desirable way. It is our view that the Ancients were not sufficiently aware of this link, that they were rarely alerted to the fact that the *lubrica aetas* was to a large extent the consequence of the fact that young men were insufficiently involved in private and public, "official", life and could not hold important responsibilities, something which was in any case inevitable in the stratified society of the day. The turnabout which marked the latter years of many youths was usually observed as a neutral fact.⁹⁹ If an explanation was offered, reference was made to age (*aetas*)¹⁰⁰ or to "saturation" and "getting sense".¹⁰¹

It was generally believed that a young man simply could not bear the burden of responsibility at too early an age. An exceptional case occurs in the history of Dio Cassius, where the candidacy of a young man (probably Scipio Aemilianus) for an important office receives backing. Reference is made here to the fact that youths were disappointed because responsible offices were refused them.¹⁰² After pointing out that one should not exaggerate the question of age, the speaker continues: "Do not discourage the young men through the idea that they are disqualified from performing any services. On the contrary, you ought to urge them to practice zealously the performance of all the duties that belong to them, and to look for both honours and offices even before they reach old age. For by this course you will render their elders better, too — first, by confronting them with many competitors, and next by making it clear that you are going to establish, not length of years, but innate excellence (*οὐκ ἐς ἀριθμοῦ ἐτῶν ἀλλ' ἐς ἀρετῆς*

⁹⁸ E.g. Plutarch, *An seni respublica gerenda sit*, 2,784 D; 7,787 C; 12,790 D; 13,791 BC; 25,796 A.

⁹⁹ E.g. Cicero, *Pro Caelio*, 12,28; 18,43. Cp. *JR* p. 78 n. 73.

¹⁰⁰ *Panegyrici latini*, 12,7,2-4. Cp. *JR* pp. 104-105.

¹⁰¹ Cicero, *Pro Caelio*, 18,42.

¹⁰² Cp. Plutarch, *An seni respublica gerenda sit*, 18,793 E: "Such [too ambitious] old men are hated by the young, who feel that they do not allow them opportunities for public activity and do not permit them to become before the public, and by people in general their love of precedence and of office is held in no less disrepute than is other old men's love of wealth and pleasure" (trans. H.N. Fowler).

ἐμφύτου) as the test in conferring honours, and particularly positions of command, upon any citizen".¹⁰³

2. Internal factors¹⁰⁴

The transition from childhood with its dependence and lack of responsibility to the independence and responsibility of adulthood went hand in hand with tensions and conflicts, with "storm and stress". A whole range of sociological factors may offer a partial explanation for this phenomenon. The youngster was, however, threatened, as it were, from within also. In his psyche there lay a sort of tension between logical thought which was beginning to develop but had not yet taken firm root — from this point of view youth especially was an *infirma, imbecilla, immatura aetas*¹⁰⁵ — and the turbulence of all kinds of irrational urges.

There are numerous texts in which mention is made of the "passions", "pleasures" and "impulses" (*libidines, voluptates, motus, impetus...*) which made it difficult for a young man to have balanced judgement and live virtuously.¹⁰⁶ As we read again and again, he was driven by the ardour or fervour (*ardor, calor, fervor...*) of youth¹⁰⁷, or by age itself (*aetas*).¹⁰⁸ As is only to be expected Christian writers were even more vivid and expressive in their descriptions of "youthful passions" than pagan authors. The following quotation from the bishop Ambrose is typical: "Who can deny, then, that adolescence and even the early years of manhood (*adulescentiam et ipsam in exordiis iuventutem*) are subject to the temptations of the passions? Who can deny, too, that, when a more mature age (*maturior aetas*) is reached, peace returns after the tempestuous yearnings of youth are passed (*tamquam pubescentis lasciviae tempestate discussa*) and the wearied soul finds at last a mooring place in some secluded harbour of life? So the turbulent emotions of youth (*graves motus adulescentiae*) are calmed down by

¹⁰³ Dio, *Historia romana*, 21,70,3 (trans. H.B. Foster). Cp. Cicero, *Philippicae*, 5,17,47 (concerning the *virtus* of young Octavian).

¹⁰⁴ Cf. *JR* pp. 94-110.

¹⁰⁵ On the weakness of youthful thinking as cause of youthful shortcomings, cf. *JR* pp. 95-97. Of course, character too influenced youthful behaviour. Cf. *JR* p. 95.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. *JR* pp. 98-102.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. *JR* pp. 102-104, esp. n. 153.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. *JR* pp. 104-105.

faithful old age".¹⁰⁹ And in the East, someone like Chrysostom was just as negative as his Milanese colleague: "Imagine the nature of youth, especially youth at its acme. The fire of nature (τῆς φύσεως ἡ φλόξ) burns in all vehemence, passions rage furiously (ὁ χεῖμῶν ν τῶν παθῶν), and reason is extremely weak".¹¹⁰

An adult was usually credited with acting according to reason, while a young man was said to be driven by the irrational. The strong emotional element in youth was seen as linked with the constitution of the body, with its strength, with the warmth of blood, and — although rarely and only in late antiquity — with the physiological changes of puberty.¹¹¹

Augustine in his *Confessions* clearly connects the beginning of his troubled youth with puberty (*scatebra pubertatis*)¹¹², and in one of his letters Jerome writes about the spurs and provocations of youth, or rather of puberty (*adulescentiae, immo pubertatis incentiva*).¹¹³ More often we read how the passions erupt angrily with great violence because the young body is so sturdy. Thus Jerome: "Youth has to endure many conflicts with the body, and amid incentives to vice and titillations of the flesh, it is stifled, as a fire is when it is fed with green wood and cannot display its proper brightness". "If even without wine I am all aglow, if I feel the fire of youth and am inflamed by hot blood (*calore sanguinis*), if I am of a strong and lusty habit of body [...]."¹¹⁴ And Ambrose: "What would lust be if the flesh did not set it afire? It cools off in the elderly, as it does in children, because their body is weak. But it burns in the young in whom bodily strength flows effervescently (*ardet in adolescentibus in quibus vis corporis fervet*)".¹¹⁵

"Hotbloodedness" appears in Ambrose's text, as is so often the case¹¹⁶, as the cause of a young man's turbulent passions.¹¹⁷

¹⁰⁹ Ambrose, *De Cain et Abel*, 1,3,11 PL 14,321 (trans. J. Savage). Cp. *JR* p. 100 n. 145.

¹¹⁰ John Chrysostom, *Epistulae*, 3,12 PG 52,585. Cp. *JR* p. 100 n. 144.

¹¹¹ Cf. *JR* pp. 106-107 (the changes of puberty); pp. 107-110 (the warmth of the blood).

¹¹² Augustine, *Confessiones*, 2,2,2.

¹¹³ Jerome, *Epistulae*, 125,1. Cp. *JR* p. 107 with n. 163.

¹¹⁴ Jerome, *Epistulae*, 52,3 and 11 (trans. F.A. Wright).

¹¹⁵ Ambrose, *De Isaac vel anima*, 7,60 PL 14,525. Cp. *JR* p. 107 n. 164.

¹¹⁶ Cf. *JR* pp. 107-110. Because youth was considered a "boiling age", especially wine — a "hot" drink — had to be avoided by youngsters (not by elder people). Cp. *JR* pp. 109-110.

¹¹⁷ In Achilles Tatius, 4,10 we read how an (in this case mental) illness, too, could be seen as the result of the warmth of the blood: "Such troubles were not lasting, but often occurred at the hot season of youth, when the blood, being young

Plutarch shares this view and interprets the phenomenon in a philosophical way. Soul and body are but one, and as proof this philosopher refers to the impulses (*αἱ ὁρμαὶ*) which arise and relax together with the changes of the body. "For this reason young men are swift and impetuous and fiery in their appetites, and stung by madness, as it were, through the abundance and heat of their blood; but in old men the source of desire, which is seated about the liver, is in the process of being extinguished and becoming small and weak, whereas reason increases more and more in vigour as the passionate element fades away together with the body." Similar ideas by the same author are to be found elsewhere where reference is also made to the influence of the "pneuma" (a mixture of the elements fire and air) which animates all: "Desire is at its height in the young, dejection in old men. The reason is that the former have a hot constitution of their blood, and a tempestuous spirit (*πνεῦμα*) for their actions, and a body, too, to serve them that is always in tune, with organs unblemished and uncontaminated; their strong pulse excites and fans their desires, which take fire from the flow of blood as it were from fresh fuel. As a result we see the young man subject to many a change in his impulses".¹¹⁸

and new, and boiling at its approach to full age, overflows the veins and floods the brain, drowning the fount of reason".

¹¹⁸ Plutarch, *De virtute morali*, 11,450 EF (trans. W.C. Helmbold); Idem, *De libidine et aegritudine*, 9 (trans. F.H. Sandbach).